

Short Story of the Day.

GEORGE VERNEY'S PICTURES

BY DOROTHY MAYNARD.

Some twelve months after the purchase by Henry Bellamy of young Verney's picture, "The Worship of Bacchus," the artist had been asked to dine at the banker's house and had met Grace Bellamy. That first meeting, in which the sympathy of the two young people was instantaneous, was the prelude to many others—to duets sung in the twilight, to long discussions upon art and pictures, and finally to a question and answer.

In the conservatory, under the fronds of a large fernlike palm, George Verney had spoken, in accents which trembled despite his effort to control them, of his love, and with one quick crimson blush from neck to brow, one look of trust and love from the beautiful blue eyes, Grace Bellamy's fair head had nestled to the young painter's shoulder, and their lips had met in one long lovers' kiss. Ten minutes later George Verney left the house after a short but stormy interview with his love's father.

"I have other views for my daughter, Verney," Henry Bellamy said firmly but not unkindly, "and it will be better for you not to visit here again until she marries."

For some time after this there was almost a quarrel between the banker and the daughter whom he loved so passionately. For many days the girl, who had never known what it was to have a single wish ungratified, treated her father as a harsh and cruel tyrant, and refused almost to speak to him. Then, one after-

noon, she had apparently thrown off her senses of injury, had conversed with him on topics which interested both of them, and had, he thought with pleasure, forgotten Verney. He was mistaken. She had married him. For many months they kept their secret well, and the married lovers met by stealth, without the knowledge of the banker. One day Mrs. Verney left his house, went to her husband once over all, and wrote to tell her father that she had done so.

Four years later Grace Verney died at Perugia of typhoid fever, and the young painter was left alone in the world with one little girl to remind him constantly of the sweet companionship which he had lost so soon. During the four short years of that sweet intercourse George Verney had worked but little, and his work had not been good. The pictures he had painted, three in number, had all been purchased by a New Yorker.

After his young wife died Verney worked hard and almost desperately. He sold his work to a dealer, and this man alone of all the art world knew that the real buyer of George Verney's work was Bellamy the banker. The dealer thought, as Verney himself might have perhaps believed, if he had known the purchaser's identity, that the pictures were bought up by Bellamy not so much as an investment as for the purpose of providing his little grand child with the necessities of life; but even so it came as a surprise to picture-lovers when Bellamy one day threw open his gallery to the public for an hour or two a week, and it was found that George Verney's pictures, with the exception of the three inferior works which had been bought by the New York collector, were all upon its walls. Then came the reconciliation. How the two men had met nobody knew, but meet they did, and it was a great surprise to all who knew the stern, unbending character of Henry Bellamy when he took George Verney and his little daughter into the great, lonely house, and to all intents and purposes made a son of him.

Ease and comfort, unfortunately, were not good for the young artist. Never a

strong character, the actual need of work had spurred him to great effort, and the double necessity of providing for his little girl and of working to forget his sorrow had urged him to paint.

After his return, however, his work fell off considerably. The few pictures which he produced while he was living at his father-in-law's were good in their way, but they lacked the vigor of his earlier efforts, and one after another he destroyed them. "I want," he said to Bellamy one day when the old man had asked him, with that grim smile of his, why he destroyed work that, although below the standard of his best, he could undoubtedly have sold. "I want the name of little Gracie's father to be remembered only for his finest work. I shall never paint again as I have painted, that I know, but until I can do something worthy to rank with what I have already done, I will destroy my pictures." The illness came, and gradually, although the doctor could put no specific name to his disease, sank into a decline.

Before the last great weakness grew upon him he had painted one great picture. It was a portrait of his dead wife as she had been in the days of her joyous girlhood. The day after it was finished George Verney took to his bed, and the doctors warned Mr. Bellamy that his son-in-law's last day was drawing near.

A few days later, while Henry Bellamy sat by the banker's dying man, a telegram was brought to him. He read the few words it contained, and held it crumpled in his hand a moment.

"George," he said, "the doctors tell me you are sinking. Would you like, while you have yet the strength, to take one last look at your pictures?"

"Ah, if I could," gasped the dying man. "You can. I have brought them all. All that is, excepting three—the three which you would destroy if you could as not being worthy of your gift. They are in New York."

"How—how—can I thank you?" murmured Verney, the hot tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Do not thank me. Summon up all your strength for this afternoon, and we will have you carried on a couch into the gallery," and Henry Bellamy went from the room smiling. It was an ugly smile to see if any one had seen it.

That afternoon the dying man was carried carefully into the long picture gal-

lery, and feasted his eyes upon the life-work which would soon be all that would be left to little Gracie of her father. Again he turned to Bellamy to thank him. It was a wondrous thing, this gift of forgiveness, the sick man thought.

In taking Grace Bellamy from her father's house, as he had done, George Verney felt that he had caused the rich man bitter sorrow, and knew that he had done him grievous wrong, for father and daughter had never met again. "Sir," he said, "how can I thank you for the last word faltered on his lips as he saw the old man's face, for he had never seen so diabolical a look before.

"Thank?" answered the millionaire, with bitter emphasis. "Do you think the milk of human kindness urged me to buy your pictures from you, to take you into my house and pamper you when you were ill? Remember the words you spoke to me before I turned you from my door. Before you enticed my daughter from her father's house, you told that father, proudly, and with head erect, that there was one thing his money could not buy—your name! Well, I have bought it. Read that. And Verney read a telegram from New York with the words, 'Accept, Hoskins.'"

"I do not understand," he said. "I will explain. Here, as you see, I have all your pictures. They are good. I know that. But you have painted three of which you are ashamed. Those three I have just bought from Hoskins, paying more for them than the best here cost me. Why, do you think? For my revenge."

"Revenge?" "Yes. On the day you die every one of these canvases of which you are so proud will be cut from its frame and burned, even that last one. They shall perish as you taught my daughter's love for me to perish. Few people, or comparatively few, know of your work except by hearsay. After your death the world shall judge of it by those three daubs which I have bought from Hoskins at ten times their value."

The dying man, white to the lips, looked up at his tormentor in speechless agony. Was this to be the end? After his years of toil, after the hopes, which he had formed that his little Gracie should go into the world armed not only with her mother's, or rather grandfather's, millions, but also with the name which he, her father, would bequeath to her, was that name to be a laughing stock to the

artistic world? The thing was too diabolically cruel. He could not believe it. And yet he slowly realized that Henry Bellamy, in acting thus, was taking a revenge which was an almost just one. He, George Verney, had taken the daughter from the father. The grandfather would take the daughter from her father, too.

"Good night," said the old man, turning on his heel. "I will send the servants up to carry you down to bed again."

Just then a patter of toddling footsteps came down the long gallery, and little Gracie, blue-eyed and golden-haired as her mother had been, toddled toward them on her unsteady baby feet.

"Kiss Gracie," she demanded imperiously, holding up her rosy mouth to the stern old man. "Now kiss father," she added. Bellamy drew a step away from the couch, and the lines round his mouth tightened. "No, dear, men never kiss," he said.

"But, gran'pa, Gracie will be naughty if you don't," the child insisted.

"What do you mean, my child?"

"Before mamma went away to the garden"—it was thus that George Verney had described his wife's burial to her little daughter—"she took me into her arms in bed, and said that I was to make you kiss papa for her sake, when we came to see you. Papa didn't want to promise, but she made him, too; and I—I forgot it till this afternoon, when Nurse said it would be too late soon." And though she did not understand what she was saying the blue eyes filled with tears.

Henry Bellamy answered no word. He placed the child down beside her father and gazed at them and at his daughter's portrait overhead.

"Is she not like—her, sir?" said Verney brokenly.

The stern old man burst into uncontrollable sobbing, and clasped the wasted hand convulsively.

"This time, sir, I may thank you?"

A kiss to Gracie was the only answer.